

Message Text

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SUBJECT: US-IRAQI ISSUES: (I) PALESTINE

REF: BAGHDAD 896

1. SUMMARY: PERCEPTIONS OF PALESTINE ARE AT THE HEART OF US-IRAQI DIFFERENCES. NO ENDURING IMPROVEMENT IN OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS IS POSSIBLE IF EACH SIDE IS NOT ABLE TO DISCERN A NEGGET OF MERIT AND SOMETHING TO WORK WITH IN THE OTHER'S POSITION ON PALESTINE. ASSUMING THAT FORTHCOMING US-IRAQI CONTACTS AT UNGA INTEND A QUALITATIVE ESCALATION IN US-IRAQI POLITICAL RELATIONS, USINT RECOMMENDS THAT US SIDE TAKE INITIATIVE AND BOLDLY HIGHLIGHT THOSE ASPECTS OF US POSITION ON PALESTINE WHICH CAN BE MADE TO APPEAR TO HAVE MORAL WEIGHT WITH IRAQIS AND WHICH GIVE GOI BASIS FOR FURTHER DEALINGS WITH US. IN THIS REGARD TONE, STYLE AND EMPHASIS CAN BE AS IMPORTANT AS SUBSTANCE; AND AN ATTITUDE OF RESPECT FOR AND IN INTEREST IN PROBING IRAQ'S VIEWS ON THIS MATTER CAN WELL LEAD TO GREATER GOI RECEPTIVITY TO US INITIATIVES ON LESS DIVISIVE ISSUES. END SUMMARY.

2. IN GOI VIEW US SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL'S CLAIMS VIS-A-VIS PLAESTINIANS IS TOTAL AND UNQUESTIONING. US EFFORTS TO LESSEN TENSIONS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND HER NEAREST ARAB NEIGHBORS ARE
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GENERALLY REGARDED AS SOPHISTICATED EFFORT TO "DEFANG"

PALESTINIANS BY IMMERSING MAJOR ARAB NATIONS IN LABYRINTH OF NEGOTIATIONS ABOUT PERIPHERAL ISSUES IN ORDER TO DISTRACT THEM FROM CHAMPIONING CAUSE OF PALESTINIANS.

3. FONMIN HAMMADI THEREFORE IS PROBABLY MENTALLY PRECONDITIONED TO EXPECT TO BE TOLD OF US ACTIVITIES AND INITIATIVES IN EVERY AREA OF MUTUAL CONCERN EXCEPT PALESTINE. HE PROBABLY, FOR EXAMPLE, EXPECTS TO RECEIVE CONGRATULATIONS FOR ENDING OF KURDISH INSURRECTION AND FOR IMPROVED RELATIONS WITH IRAN AND THE GULF STATES. HE WOULD NOT BE SURPRISED TO HEAR REVIEW OF RECENT US ACTIVITIES IN SINAI NEGOTIATIONS AND TO LEARN OF LATEST US POSITION ON OIL AND ON CONSUMER-PRODUCER ADIALOGUE. BUT HE PROBABLY ENVISAGES HIMSELF AT THE END OF SUCH A PRESENTATION BEING COMPELLED TO SAY: WE WELCOME ALL THIS BUT WHY DOES THE US KEEP DODGING THE CENTRAL ISSUE: HOW TO RECONCILE EQUITABLY AND PEACEFULLY THE CONFLICTING CLAIMS OF JEWS AND ARABS TO THE RIGHT TO EXERT POLITICAL AUTHORITY IN PALESTINE?

4. A VERY GOOD CASE CAN THEREFORE BE MADE FOR THE US, IN THE FORTHCOMING TALKS, TO TAKE AN UNEXPECTED TACK AND BOLDLY TO ADDRESS THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM AT ONCE, ATTEMPTING TO SEE THE ISSUE THROUGH IRAQI EYES AND ACKNOWLEDGING, AS AN EXAMPLE, THE AGONIZING HUMAN PROBLEMS FACED BY THE EXCLUSION OF PROUD, TALENTED PALESTINIANS FROM POLITICAL POWER IN THEIR HOMELAND. IT IS HARD TO IMAGINE ANY NEW SUBSTANTIVE CONCESSIONS TO BE MADE TO THE IRAQI VIEWPOINT. BUT, TONE AND FORM OF PRESENTATION, AND, PARTICULARLY EMPHASIS (WHAT IS SAID AND WHAT IS LEFT UNSAID) WILL AT LEAST BE AS IMPORTANT AS SUBSTANCE. TONE SHOULD (A) CONVEY GENUINE HUMAN CONCERN FOR PALESTINIANS PLUS (B) COMMUNICATE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT THAT IRAQIS ARE APPROACHING PROBLEM FROM MORALLY DEFENSIBLE OR AT LEAST ARGUABLE (ALBEIT RESTRICTED) POINT OF VIEW. FORM OF PRESENTATION SHOULD SELECT AND HIGHLIGHT THE MOST ATTRACTIVE (FROM PALESTINIAN AND IRAQI POINT OF VIEW) FEATURES OF OUR POLICY ON ISRAEL AND PALESTINE OVER THE PAST 30 YEARS: E.G. REFUGEE ASSISTANCE, SUPPORT FOR UN RESOLUTIONS. PRESENTATION SHOULD ALSO EXPLICITLY EXPRESS POSITIVE UNDERSTANDING FOR PALESTINIAN ASPIRATIONS AND MIGHT USEFULLY CULMINATE IN STATEMENT THAT US, WHILE NOT A PRINCIPAL PARTY TO THE DISPUTE, CONFIDENTIAL

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WOULD SUPPORT ANY FINAL POLITICAL SOLUTION WHICH IS ACCEPTABLE TO BOTH ISRAEL AND PALESTINIANS AND ENCOURAGES AT THE JUNCTURE THE CONSIDERATION OF ANY PARTIAL SOLUTIONS WHICH ATTEMPT PEACEFULLY TO APPLY THE RULES OF LAW AND EQUITY TO THE COMPETING CLAIMS OF ALL PARTIES.

5. US MIGHT ADD THAT WE HAVE PROFITED FROM ADVICE OF MANY ARAB LEADERS ON HOW TO MOVE IN DIRECTION OF GENERAL POLITICAL

SETTLEMENT AND WOULD EQUALLY WELCOME CONSTRUCTIVE ADVICE FROM IRAQ AS WELL, WITH ACKNOWLEDGMENT THAT IRAQ IS IN UNIQUES POSITION TO INFLUENCE PALESTINIAN LEADERS.

6. HOW WOULD HAMMADI AND THE GOI REACT TO SUCH AN APPROACH? VERY POSITIVELY. THE GOI BY NOW HAS APPARAENTLY COME TO BELIEVE ITS OWN RHETORIC AND IS SINCERELY CONVINCED THAT THE US IS OUT TO TOSS THE PALESTINIANS UPON THE DUSTBIN OF HISTORY. A TACTICAL APPROACH WHICH BEGINS FROM AN EFFORT TO IDENTIFY THE MERITS OF THE IRAQI POSITION AND WHICH SKILLFULLY AND CONVIN- CINGLY UNDERLINES OUR INTEREST TO THE IRAQI SPOKESMAN IN FIND- ING AN OVERALL SOLUTION WHICH IS FAIR TO THE PALESTINIANS CAN- NOT FAIL TO HAVE A VERY STRONG IMPACT ON GOI. OBVIOUS AS SUCH A POSITION MAY BE IN WASHINGTON, IT IS NOT THE US POSITION AS SEEN BY BAGHDAD. WHEN REPORTED BY HAMMADI TO THE RCC. THIS OSTENSIBLY "FRESH" APPROACH MAY GIVE THE BAATH PARTY PRAGMATISTS PRECISELY THE "IDEOLOGICAL" UNDERPINNING THEY NEED IN ORDER TO OVERCOME THE OBJECTIONS OF THE PRO-SOVIET WING TO DEALING WITH THE US ON THE POLITICAL LEVEL. THIS REACTION WOULD BE ESPECIALLY PLAUSIBLE IF HAMMADI HAD BEEN MADE TO BELIEVE THAT THE USG WOULD WELCOME AN ACTIVE ROLE FOR IRAQ IN MEDIATING BETWEEN THE US AND THE PALESTINIAN LEADERS. ASIDE FROM THE WELL-KNOWN ARAB DELIGHT IN SUCH MEDIATIONS (CFR. BOUMEDIENNE WITH THE SHAH AND SADDAM HUSSEIN; YAMANI WITH SYRIA AND IRAQ ON THE EUPHRATES WATERS, ETC.), IRAQ WOULD DERIVE MEASURABLE SATISFACTION AT BEING RECOGNIZED AS ABLE TO INFLUENCE BOTH THE US (AND, THROUGH THE US, ISRAEL) AND THE PALESTINIANS. IT IS DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE ANYTHING, ON THE OTHER HAND, LESS LIKELY AT THIS TIME TO IMPROVE US-IRAQI RELATIONS THAN A DELIBERATE US EFFORT TO EXCLUDE IRAQ FROM SUCH A POSITION OF INFLUENCE IN REGARD TO A PALESTINIAN SETTLEMENT.

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7. CONCLUSION: IN DEALING WITH IRAQ THERE IS NO DODGING THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE. ON THE OTHER HAND THE US HAS OBVIOUSLY BY NOW DEVELOPED A POSITION ON PALESTINE WHICH HAS BEEN AT LEAST GRUDGINGLY OR PROVISIONALLY ACCEPTED BY OTHER LEADING ARAB PROTAGONISTS. CONTROLLING, THEREFORE, FROM THE VERY BE- GINNING THE LINE OF CONVERSATION ON THIS ISSUE, WITH A MAXIMUM EFFORT TO GO IN THROUGH THE IRAQI DOOR IN ORDER TO COME OUT OUR OWN, IS PROBABLY THE BEST WAY FOR THE US TO ADDRESS THE MATTER AT THIS TIME. IF THE GOI BECOMES CONVINCED THAT THERE IS ENOUGH JUSTICE TO THE US POSITION AND A WORKABLE ELEMENT OF OPENNESS TO THE ASPIRATIONS OF IRAQ'S PALESTINIAN CLIENTS, IT IS NOT INCONCEIVABLE THAT SUBSEQUENT PROGRESS IN IMPROVING U.S.- IRAQI POLITICAL RELATIONS WILL BE RAPID AND CONTINUOUS,
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